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THE DEAD HAND.

WE come into this world empty-handed, and when we go out of it, we can take nothing with us. So Scripture tells us, and our hearts echo the truth. Dives is dead. The man whose written or spoken word, one short week ago, was worth many thousand gold-pieces, the lord of lands and treasures, lies low to-day, low as poor Lazarus, who was his very humble servant and debtor, and died insolvent. They bury the rich man with proper state and solemnity, the hugest plumes, the sleekest sable horses, the gravest and glossiest mutes, all the upholstery of decorous woe. It is done, and the sculptor is at work on the grand marble monument that shall celebrate his virtues. The heir pays the undertaker's bill, grumbling, perhaps, a little at its amount, but grumbling below his breath, lest people should call him a shabby fellow—him, the inheritor of all the acres, shares, scrip, and funded property of the departed. There—the cheque is drawn, the expensive obsequies are over, and the rich man is poor and powerless as the beggar at his gate.

Not exactly so, after all; there is much truth in what has been said, but not the whole truth. Dives and the upper earth have not quite dissolved partnership, in spite of Death and of black horses, mourning-coaches, and Mr Mole's receipted bill for crape and velvet. From the grave itself, Dives stretches out a Hand, a Dead Hand, it is true, but potent yet, to grasp and rule his beloved property. Not easily do men relinquish their sway of what they have hugged to their hearts so long, of what they have schemed and striven for, longed for, thirsted after, got and kept by means fair or foul, according to their consciences. The Dead Hand keeps its clutch on the dear gold, the cherished acres, and will not unloose its hold. In more prosaic language, Dives has made his will.

Wills are common things enough, but of all the curious conventionalities of society, they are perhaps the strangest, if we do but look below the surface. That a man should own and enjoy his goods and gear to the fullest while alive, seems simple to all but the interesting disciples of MM. Fourier and Cabot. Even a Papuan negro can understand that. But that his possession should continue for centuries after his bones have dropped to dust; that he should control the living during ages yet to come, and exercise authority over unborn generations, is

certainly a wonderful thing. Yet the talisman by which these prodigies are effected is merely a dusty deed, written on parchment or paper yellowed by age, but signed, sealed, delivered, proved, and registered as the law demands. Nothing shews more clearly the desire of Society in the abstract to do justice, than this implicit respect for the wishes of the long-dead, and the semi-sanctity with which a will is envired.

It must be owned that this excessive reverence for the written pleasure of defunct owners of money and land has been sadly abused at times. Testators have ridden their hobbies very hard, trusting to the world's fairness and tenderness to carry out objects that in some cases were neither fair nor tender. Many wills bear internal evidence of having been made out of pure spite; others betray morbid misanthropy, unhealthy sentiment, puerile vanity, or dangerous ambition. Some testators, especially of ancient days, were clearly mad; others have evinced a baboon-like malignity in affixing painful and odious conditions to their bequests. In many instances, sheer whim, innocent enough, but short-lived, and based on the most trivial grounds, has been the avowed motive of posthumous munificence. Often does it happen that if the public at large, instead of the sapient seniors of the Probate Court, had to decide on the validity of an absurd or unfeeling will, it would be torn to fragments amidst universal hooting; and it does occasionally happen that a testament, like that of the famous Bridgewater case, annulled by the House of Lords on 'grounds of public policy,' is set aside for the general good.

We are bound, however, to be very chary of such reversals. There is no doctrine more perilously alluring than that which teaches that the judgment of the individual must be made to bow to that of the majority, and that whatever is unpopular is bad. After all, we cannot judge of the strength of the feelings that once thrilled a dead bosom; we do not know, and cannot know, the complex reasons that may have urged actions that to us appear midsummer madness. If old Hunks did cut off his nephews and nieces with a shilling, we need not point the finger of scorn at his tomb, ignorant as we are why he drew the codicil that gave his Three per Cents to the Spectacle-makers' Company. If old Miss Mincer really left her fortune to the polite stranger who gave her the best seat in his pew as she stood, forlorn and desolate, with her queer bonnet and grotesque gown,

in the aisle of a strange church, who are we that we should deny her sanity? How can we gauge the impression which an act of kindly courtesy, soon forgotten by the doer, may have made on the withered heart of that poor, lonely old woman? Better so, than to endow a college or a cat, out of absolute lack of objects of human interest and sympathy.

There is something touching in the confidence in which, in a country like ours, men die and bequeath what they had, little or much, as the case may be, to those they loved best, and perhaps to helpless children or timid women, who know nothing of business, and have no power of a combative kind in their soft natures. There are executors appointed, and, it may be, trustees; but the true executor, the real trustee, is no other than the British nation. People die, confident that the arrangements they have made will keep the wolf from the door of those they leave to weep their loss. If there is blundering, the nation, through its law-courts, will set it right; if there is fraud, the nation will punish it. The ægis of Britannia will be as sure a protection as a mere earthly ægis, with unavoidable flaws in it, can be. It is not so in all lands. In the East, when a rich man dies, there is wailing and dismay in his house, not entirely in sorrow for the dead, so great is the terror of the living. Swoop! down come the official vultures on the home of mourning. Here they come, those swaggering gholams, those oily lawyers, those brutal ferasches, in the king's name, to claim the king's share in the inheritance; and they sack the house, and dig for buried treasure in the garden, and very possibly put the family to the torture, if disappointed of plunder and bribes.

Before the reign of King Henry VIII., an Englishman could no more will away his real property, his fields and woods, than a modern Frenchman can disinherit a scapegrace son. To be sure, the hardship was not excessive, since very little English soil was then held in fee-simple by anybody. The great nobles, the wealthy knights and esquires, had fiefs instead of freeholds. Smaller gentry lived on their copyholds, their leases for a string of lives granted by church or crown, and the whole country was enmeshed in a great net of fines, fees, cess, service, poundage, and forfeiture. The confiscation of convent property threw much land into the market, and the free disposal of this land by will became an urgent national want. In elder days, the monasteries and religious foundations had been for a while favoured by the law-makers; they could inherit where a lay-heir would have been sent empty away. Their deep-voiced friars stood by the death-bed of baron and franklin, urging the expiring penitent to blot out the sins of a life by adding to the rent-roll of the monastery; and Malvoisin and bluff Longstaff, who had, perhaps, been stiff-necked railers at monkish luxury, and eager snatchers at church-lands when well and hearty, now proved plastic as wax between the dexterous fingers of their ghostly father.

At last the state became alarmed. If this death-bed penitence were not curbed in its outward manifestation of endowing abbey and minster, there was risk that the whole available property of England might pass into clerical hands. Successive statutes of mortmain were passed to check this consummation, but the risk endured until the Reformation had pared down the vast territorial wealth of the church. Yet, if we choose to grope among the black-letter deeds in old cartularies and muniment-rooms, we shall find that most monasteries were endowed, not by will, but by gift—the *donatio inter vivos*, as it was called—though the term hardly applies to a transaction between Sir Philip Malvoisin, palsied, ghastly, and with the damps of death on his brow, and the rosy prior of Jorvaulx, admirably robust in body, and remarkably wide-awake to the conventual interests. It was thought best, on the whole, that Sir Philip

should make his tremulous cross and splash of yellow wax at the foot of a deed of gift.

It may be remarked, that most of the great English schools date from Tudor days, or from those of the first Stuart. A few were founded under King Hal, more during the short reign of his young son, most during the long period of Elizabeth's authority. There was a mania just then for founding places of education, a passion based on many reasons in that age of stirring mental activity. The bequests made, the schoolhouses built, and the founders' names embalmed in Latin prayers and inscriptions, the property went on swelling and augmenting in value, with the rising prosperity of the country, age after age. So it fared with many an ancient grammar-school. The actual fabric might decay, and very often did decay, physically and metaphorically; but the golden tide of prosperity rose and rose until it swamped the dreaming trustees, and overflowed into the High Court of Chancery. Gables and mullions crumbled away, stone-fronts were coarsely repaired with brick, Elizabethan windows were patched with common glass, scholars fell off gradually, and the number of the taught dwindled to a minimum. Yet the ruinous foundation grew in wealth as leases dropped in, and the national store increased.

As with schools for the young, so with refuges for the old. Such and such stately hospitals, year by year growing less worthy of their name, year by year sheltering fewer of the poor headmen, poor brethren, poor pensioners, for whose behoof they were reared, were notoriously waxing in wealth as they declined in bounty. Here, the daily dole, an institution adapted to do more harm than good, perhaps, but still a well-meant donation, had been reduced to an absurdity. There, a great almshouse, meant to be a quiet haven for decayed persons of education and good repute, sore buffeted by life's storms, had been partly shut up, partly perverted into a convenient shelf whereon to lay aside the worn-out dependents of the warden and governors. And so on, and so on, through dreary labyrinths of malversation and wrong-doing.

The Dead Hand was the real cause of all this evil and neglect. Its grasp upon the lands was tenacious; but it was a cold, hard gripe, easily eluded by the unscrupulous living men who paid it lip-service and mock-homage. Old Gervase the usurer, say, left his estates to found a school, with an asylum for the aged tacked thereto; and Dame Winifred gave hers to an almshouse; and Sir Paul Spice, alderman and mayor, signed away his worldly wealth to endow a school, as Gervase had done, and to grant all manner of scholarships and exhibitions to clever and needy lads, bred at his school, and bound for Oxford or Cambridge.

The gifts from the Dead Hand throve mightily. Each new generation saw the snowball of gathering property swell to more monstrous compass. Dame Winifred's poor uplands have tripled as to rent, her young oaks have grown up to build a navy. The London hovels that belonged to Gervase are replaced by the genteelst of squares and the most respectable of streets. As for Sir Paul, could the old grocer see his swampy meadows near to London walls, now covered by brick and mortar, red-tiled dwellings, and enormous warehouses, he could hardly believe his eyes. Where those three old founders pocketed groats, their worshipful stewards and trustees can pay golden sovereigns into their bankers' custody. Thus throve the gifts of Gervase, Paul, and Winifred, doubling and quadrupling with every rise in the world's exchange.

But all the living—such of the living as had to do with the disposal of these gifts—seemed to be in a grand tacit conspiracy against the Dead Hand. They got between it and the folks whom it had meant to help along life's highway; they turned the fountain of its generosity into alien channels; they fought and wrestled, they pared and nibbled, till the original intention of the founder was about as much regarded

as the testament of Cheops. Even honourable men, where they had to deal with live fellow-citizens, became sad shufflers, and quite changed their natures at the first contact with the Dead Hand. Truth was not truth exactly, nor probity necessarily strait-laced, when that terrible Hand was in question. Wrong any man—John Brown, for instance—of a penny or a pennysworth—never, never as long as Robinson draws the breath of life. But as regards the trust-funds of that school, my dear sir, that is quite another question, and you must perceive that it would be Quixotic prudery to boggle at what every one has invariably done. Wherefore, we will—yes, I think we will let my brother-in-law have the lease renewed on the terms he proposes; and your nephew, Jones, will make a capital auditor, as you say, and I think, gentlemen, the Board may as well plumpily reject that absurd application of the head-master for an increase of salary.

It is the old, old story. The stewards have had it their own way so long, first getting one modest finger into the luscious pie, then a second finger, finally the whole hand, that by the time they have taken possession of the mansion, and elbowed the true proprietors to the door, they feel a profound assurance that all they have usurped is theirs of right. And when Chancery, or a parliamentary commission, comes down upon them like a halting Nemesis, they shriek, and protest, and appeal to the public to protect them in their just claim to do as they like with other people's property, and consider themselves the most ill-used of our species. But the root of all the mischief is in the Hand. It offered an irresistible temptation to weak souls, like a wrecked galleon with none to claim it. It kept no watch, exercised no discretion, but was stiff and helpless as a marble idol. Sir Paul, with his flat cap and shining shoes, could not drop into the board-room to cudgel his faithless servants. Winifred was perforce dumb while they turned her 'decayed gentlewomen' into the street. Gervase had no power to petition the House or the Chancellor to redress the abuses of his noble charity. The property lay like a stranded whale, hacked at or gnawed at by every one and everything that had a taste for blubber.

Other Pauls and Winifreds left their goods and acres to carry out objects far less beneficial than teaching the young, or harbouring lone old age. We find that certain lands and moneys were bequeathed, here and there, for the deliberate encouragement of pauperism in all its branches. Master William Winkle, out of pure kindness, gave some hundreds a year, now grown into some thousands, through circumstances over which the said William had no control, to feed, warm, and clothe the poor of some particular villages. Innocent William! he would have stood aghast, were he never so obtuse, had he but known that he was sowing the seeds of much more misery than his cash could ever relieve. Perhaps William, out of family feeling, gave a preference to founder's kin, to anybody who could satisfy a vestry or a board that in their veins ran the tittle of a drop of Winkle blood; and in that case, there is much heart-burning and carping, much perjury and grumbling, rejected kindred of the tenth degree prowling empty around the parish boundaries, and bitterly complaining of the false strangers in cousin's clothing whom the partiality of the trustees has let in before them.

Or, perhaps, Will, as in one notable case in the west of England, ordered that coals, food, money, and clothes should be distributed annually to the indigent of certain villages, but that no penny of his should go to build cottages for them to dwell in. Had Master Winkle been scurvily used by some rogue-architect, that he so hated bricks and mortar? Or was William a grim practical joker, who chuckled at the tough knot he was going to tie for the confusion of society?

More likely, he was a good easy man, soft of head and heart, and as ignorant of political economy as of submarine telegraphy. His bequest bore fruit—sour apples, that disagreed with many constitutions. Of course, there was a steady flow of all the poverty and laziness of that countryside into Master Winkle's cities of refuge. There they came, and there they stayed, a stagnant preserve of vicious paupers. The few rotten old cottages were crammed as full of unwashed humanity as the houses of Alastia or the Savoy had been. More cottages could not be built out of Master Winkle's fast growing stores, on account of the testator's holy horror of architecture. And few speculators were likely to invest their capital in building for such tenants as Master Winkle's hereditary pensioners were likely to prove. So they lived on, idle, improvident, ague-haunted lazzaroni, until higher authority took a besom to that Angean stable, and insisted on grafting Winkle's sour apple-trees with wholesome fruit.—One peculiarity of such baneful charities as these is that nobody is grateful for them or their dubious benefits. People take the gifts of the Dead Hand without thankfulness, and usually with an uneasy and grudging scrutiny. They suspect that they have not got 'their rights,' and that some one has muddled the stream before it reaches them. A poor family would feel more gratitude to a live squire for a half-acre of potato-ground, or to a live parson for getting a daughter into respectable service, than to William Winkle for all the coals, loaves, and corduroys officially doled out during a century.

Many are the signs and tokens that the old superstition, by virtue of which a dead man's wishes were supposed to be so sacred as to override every plea of mercy, justice, or usefulness, is waning and paling away, like a ghost at cockcrow. A testator's power of entailing his estate has been smartly clipped, and he can no longer prescribe who shall be owner of a given parcel of land for ever and a day. Every fresh change in the law tends to add to the power of the living to do what they think best with their own, while they possess it, but to curtail the might of the Dead Hand. And there is no reason why the bequests of Sir Paul and his compeers should not be dealt with rather according to the genial spirit of the givers, than to a narrowed and harsh interpretation of the letter of their words. Their store has multiplied exceedingly, thanks to other men's labours; and where they bade to spread the board—whether for a feast of learning or of food—for scores, there is now enough and to spare for hundreds. Were the rich foundations of England once placed on such a footing as common sense demands, and this is doubtless but a question of time, there would be cause for millions to bless what is now sparingly dealt and coldly taken—the posthumous liberality of the Dead Hand.

ENGLAND'S THUNDER-STORE.

THERE are some things, I am well aware, in which, although they belong to himself, a man is apt to be much mistaken. If he have a pony, for instance, it is certain to be, in his own opinion, the very best pony that ever stepped: a pony that is worth his weight in gold, and will not be sold under two and twenty pounds in consequence; a pony that was picked, sir, out of a drove by the present possessor, and concerning which judicious choice his former proprietor observed that 'the gentleman knew a good animal—he did—when he saw it.' It used to be the same with one's own double-barrel; many a one might be more handsomely turned out, and enjoy more meretricious advantages; 'but for service—real service—and execution, give me my old gun.' Rifles, rather than guns, are now become the objects of man's egotistic admiration; but that does not matter for our argument. There are some possessions, we say, which we are all prone to admire unduly; some geese in our

own farmyard, which the most modest of us will persist in holding to be swans.

One's legs, in particular, are a property in which most of us take an inordinate pride, quite independent of their intrinsic merits. Simon Tappertit, who had very thin legs indeed, we are told, could never keep his admiring eyes off them; and I know gentlemen in real life, with legs upon which one wonders how they dare venture out, who indulge in a similar hallucination. The Alpine Club is nothing more nor less than a society in love with their legs; its members are vain beyond measure of those particular limbs; they take every opportunity of rolling their trousers up to their knees, that the general public may be gratified by the inspection of what affords themselves such intense pleasure; and they would give three times the amount of their subscriptions for life, to any man who would furnish them with a decent excuse for adopting the Highland garb. They call themselves Alpine, and make it their profession to walk uphill, simply and solely, as I believe, that they may exhibit these limbs to the best advantage. For consider, what reasonable being would walk uphill if he could help it? Does not everybody—including the more sagacious of the dumb animals—avoid a hill whenever it is possible, and even make a detour for that purpose. Is not the effect of walking uphill to tighten the chest, to incarnadine the visage, and to strain the sinews? Does not Science go hand in hand with Nature in her abhorrence of a hill, and make a cutting or a tunnel of it, rather than attempt its ascent at all? The question does not admit of debate. I myself knock under in the matter of legs to no man living, and herein perhaps may lie my weakness—but I am not vain of their appearance. No human eye ever detected me in knickerbockers. Yet for walking—for a little distance and not fast—I defy competition. I have walked as much as most pedestrians; not, indeed, at the rate of sixty miles a day during a long vacation, but by easy stages all the summer through. I walk to enjoy myself, not to lose the fat which months of inaction have produced upon me. I have thus circumnavigated—although never upon shipboard—almost all the sea-coast of England. I select the coast, not only because it can never be otherwise than beautiful, with the glorious ocean for part of its scenery, but because the walking is mostly flat—upon sand or shingle. When it is not so, there is but a short, sharp climb, and then a long, delightful stretch over the breezy cliffs that well repays the exertion; and then comes that *bonne bouche* of the pedestrian—Down Hill! In some more favoured planet I have often thought there may be reserved for good men, with good legs, a *Switzerland all down-hill*.

However, even as matters are now arranged, I have made my way from the Solway to the Land's End, and have since been doing the east coast with little fatigue and vast enjoyment. When I have done the whole island—become the first pedestrian circumnavigator of Great Britain—I shall probably publish my experiences. They will be interesting, as I believe, and certainly novel. When I come upon any sea-side town, I merely mention the fact, and go on to what is comparatively unknown ground. When I am stopped by a river, I walk along its banks, until I find a bridge or a boat to take me across, when I immediately return to the coast-line. Of course, this method of travel is not cheap; even in shoe-leather my expenses are enormous; but I look to a discerning public to repay me all. Before my great work, however, comes out, I do not see why I should not give a specimen of its quality in these pages. I have called it England's Thunder-store, from which title it will perhaps be difficult to guess the spot which is about to be described. But I experienced the same difficulty myself with respect to it, and enjoyed the thing all the more when I under-

stood it. When I start upon my day's journey, I never inquire what place I am coming upon. I repress the informing disposition of the waiters at the hotels; I eschew guide-books and maps; and make out everything for myself by actual observation. In this beautiful spirit of ignorance and inquiry, myself and my man Thomas—who carries my knapsack on these excursions—came only the other day, without the least expecting it, upon England's Thunder-store.

We were in Essex—I knew so much—and had been dropped by a Thames steamer upon the left bank before the open sea began. Our way was almost as flat on the landward side as on the other, but not without its picturesque features. We saw afar many a church-tower amid the unfrequent trees; we passed by little vicarages, made of wood, and almost toy-like, but set in flowery lawns sloping down to the beach, and, in strange contrast with them, long, white, many-windowed preventive stations, looking like marine work-houses. 'Prevention,' remarked I, 'so far as appearance goes at least, is not better than Cure in these parts, Thomas;' but Thomas only touched his hat, for he did not understand the allusion.

I went moodily on without speaking for several minutes, for I dislike, above all things, to be unappreciated. The Alpine Club, who walk four miles an hour uphill, neither make nor entertain conversation, but pedestrianism, pure and simple, of that kind is hateful to me. Like the great Samuel Johnson, 'I love talk,' and like him, too, I have an objection to be contradicted. Thomas, if not always appreciative, is never contradictory; on the contrary, he is conciliating. If it had been I who made the following observation first, and he had sympathised with it, I should have thought nothing of the circumstance; but as Thomas was the first speaker, the coincidence about to be recorded is perhaps the most remarkable since the invention of human speech. 'Do you like mackerel fried or biled, sir?' inquired my companion, breaking an unpleasant silence. 'I had a friend a cook, sir, as I once thought of uniting myself with, who used to say when mackerel was biled it was spiled.'

'Thomas,' said I, stopping short and sitting down, 'this matter must be inquired into. It is a question of the utmost physiological and metaphysical importance.' 'Yes, sir; cook used to say that it was everything.' 'Nonsense; cook was a fool: listen to me, Thomas. What put mackerel into your head? For I was thinking of mackerel at that same moment; I was debating whether I liked it fried or biled at the very time you asked me the question.'

'Lor', sir,' said Thomas, breaking out into a profuse perspiration; 'why, that's Second Sight, or summut like it: one of us is surely going to die. There's a ship standin' in just round the point yonder, I see her mask; perhaps she's got a doctor on board.'

'That mast (not mask, Thomas) belongs to another preventive station, and will never get round the point; but no matter for that. There is no cause for fear. I have already discovered the reason of our both getting mackerel into our heads. Do you see yon bank covered with that tall, green weed; and do you not recognise the odour that blows therefrom, so powerful that all other scents are drowned in it?'

'Fennel sauce!' cried Thomas, slapping his legs in an ecstasy, at being released from the bondage of superstition. 'Bless me sir! but you are a clever one.'

'Yes,' said I, complacently, 'a bank of wild fennel was the sole cause of the curious coincidence. But for my possessing a philosophic mind, Thomas—Bless my heart alive! Goodness gracious! Oh, lor! What was that?'

Thomas had thrown himself down face-foremost on the sand, and, of course, made no reply. I do not wonder at his being alarmed, for I was a little startled myself. I had been interrupted in my remarks by the most terrific explosion, close to our very feet, as it seemed, which I had ever listened to. It shook the

earth and the air; nay, far out to sea, its effects were visible in an inverted pyramid of foam. When I saw that, my native intrepidity reasserted itself at once; I understood what had happened.

Thomas, said I, 'you are a coward; do you not know a gunshot when you hear it? That is only the thunder of your native land. Do you not see the targets, which the ebb-tide is leaving bare; they are now practising at the second one; the ball—here I used the telescope, which, my only luggage, is always slung across my shoulders—the ball has gone through it, like a professional equestrian through a paper hoop. We must be coming upon Shoebury Ness.'

'Let us go back again, sir,' cried Thomas earnestly; 'let us take a walk inland for a change.'

'Nay,' said I; 'let us wait here until all is over, and then we will investigate the place. They never fire in this direction, of course.'

'What is this, then?' inquired my companion tremulously. He pointed to a circular piece of iron, projecting from the sand, close by, like an ostrich's egg, only about ten times the size, and ten thousand times the weight.

'Well,' said I, calmly, 'that is a shell; it would have hurt us if it had hit us; but it is as innocent now as any ball of feathers. Let us dig it out.' I lit my pipe in order the more thoughtfully to consider this phenomenon, while Thomas shovelled the sand away from the Thunderbolt with his stick.

'I don't half like the job, sir,' said he; 'but you always know best.'

'I should think I did,' replied I; 'that is the advantage of education. But you know a good deal for your station in life, Thomas; you do. You can read almost anything, can't you?'

'Well, sir, pretty nigh; if I knows what it's about beforehand.'

'Now, while I take your place there, and dig a little, let us see if you can read me what that board says, headed "*Notice*," and dated "*War-office*," yonder; I suppose it's something about trespassers.'

Thomas read as follows: 'All persons are earnestly warned against picking up shells found upon this beach.'

'Dear me,' interrupted I, 'how very arbitrary; it would never do to bring children down here, then; all right, Thomas—I'm getting it out now—"shells found upon this beach," go on.'

'The same being—"Heaven preserve us!" cried Thomas, rushing over the wild fennel, and into the next field, like a lunatic. 'Run, master—run.'

His terror was so real and unmistakable, that I was almost as quick as himself in getting away, although without being in the least aware of what had occurred.

'What is the matter,' said I, 'when we had got a good distance inland; is it snakes?'

'Oh, no, sir,' faltered Thomas; 'it's worse than that—it's shells; "the same being dangerous and deadly in the highest degree!"'

It was my turn to grow pale then. I remembered that sad tragedy at Eastbourne, where the two soldiers found the Armstrong shell upon the shore, with the fuse yet in it, although they knew it not; and how they had sat down and smoked while they examined it, exactly as Thomas and I had done; and how presently, with a roar and a rush, the dreadful thing had exploded, killing one, and wounding the other. So we sat in the beanfield to see what would come of it—if I had by any chance lighted the fuse—for about three-quarters of an hour, which I conjectured must be the extreme limit that even a very 'slow match' would take to produce its catastrophe; and then we resumed our journey.

There had been no thunderbolts in the interim, whereby we rightly concluded that the firing was over for that day. The long, long stretch of sand could now be seen, with its different ranges of targets, from

one to four thousand yards; and sprinkled with soldiers, and horsemen, and even artillery wagons, where but a little time before had rolled the solitary sea. The picturesqueness which the presence of death-dealing Man imparted to this tide-abandoned waste was remarkable indeed; nor upon the desolate and treeless promontory, which is Shoebury Ness, were his works less impressive—and striking. Among the long thin grass, about which the rabbits played as carelessly as though they knew the difference between three hundred pound shot and No. 5, lay huge fragments of wrought iron, torn, twisted, perforated, shattered by the awful power of Armstrong. In one place, a bunch of forget-me-nots shewed themselves through a hole in a jagged target, which having opposed its ineffectual strength to the winged ball, had been contemptuously cast aside like a waterproof that doesn't keep out the wet, and has no other advantage to recommend it. Jagged and prostrate, how different did it look from its spick-and-span brother, five inches thick, with teak and oak to back it, standing up so defiant of the battery it confronted! Nothing to mar the smoothness of its iron countenance, save a few cross-lines, for the easier estimation of the damage that will surely be wrought upon it. For to the same iron-mould complexion and jagged feature must all Shoebury targets come at last, no matter what their powers of resistance.

'Nothing as can float, can stand us,' as the sergeant of artillery, who very soon constituted himself our guide, observed. 'This is the exact plating of the *Warrior*, than which hardly thicker iron can encase a sea-worthy vessel, and only see how we have treated it.'

He pointed to another Target,* the depth of whose solid face, I could scarcely span, but which had been treated much as a mischievous boy treats a drum-head. How such a mass could ever be got to float seemed wonderful, but how anything could ever hurt it, if it did, was still more surprising. Yet if the *Warrior*, thus accounted, should come within a hundred yards of a land-battery armed with a hundred and fifty-pounders, as this target had done—or gin a *Warrior* meet a *Warrior* similarly armed—something like what we now saw before us would infallibly happen. Here an eighty-pound ball had rushed upon it, making only such an indentation as a child makes sitting upon the sand from which the tide has just withdrawn; here, a missile somewhat heavier had cracked the solid structure as dry mud cracks in the sun; here another, double the weight, had passed right through the target almost clean, like a bullet through a window-pane, and crashed into the wood behind; and here, another, had gone but half-way in, and stuck there, with its awful head buried in the metal. My companion approached this formidable object with much reluctance, notwithstanding the assurances of our military friend. 'Dangerous and deadly in the highest degree,' reiterated Thomas; 'I shall never forget that.'

'But it can't go off,' insisted the sergeant; 'if it went anywhere, it must go on. As it is, such a matter as that would have done no injury at all.'

'What!' cried Thomas, 'no injury? To have a thing like that sticking half-in half-out of a man—'

'I am speaking of a ship, sir—a ship. The hole would be made water-tight by the ball itself.'

'Now, how much would that missile cost?' inquired I.

'A little over a fiver,' returned the sergeant coolly. 'The target on your left, there, that is all but knocked

* By this word Target the reader is not to understand an oval of straw such as *Toxophilites* shoot at, but an enormous broad slab of wrought-iron, uniform in thickness, and propped and strengthened and padded with teak and wood and india-rubber and earth. The targets, on the other hand, upon the sand, are built to prove the accuracy only of the firing, and are riddled by every shot that hits them.

to pieces, cost two thousand guineas; so what with the balls and what with the things as we breaks with them, we spends a good deal of money. We have tried every description of target; see, here's one made of loose bars of iron—I'd as soon stand behind a shepherd's hurdle; and even the very best has something wrong with them; we want a solid sheet of iron, without a rivet in it; the rivets will start—and its enough to make 'em—when they gets hit by them things.

He pointed to a pile of Armstrong balls—so different from the old round shot—with their raised rifling shewing like piano keys, or like rare cabalistic writing, telling of Destruction and Death.

'Still,' said I, 'the armour of ships must always have rivets, and it is only ship-armour that you have to deal with.'

'True,' returned the sergeant doggedly; 'but if we had land-armour to deal with, Lor' bless you, sir, we'd serve that just the same.'

'Well,' observed I, 'you are right to speak up for your trade; it is certain you are not retained for the defence. But how is it, if guns can thus destroy ship-armour, that we should still go on building Ironclads.'

'Why, sir, it's just this; although we can destroy them, nobody else can. This here place—these few acres of grass and sand—contains secrets as neither Frenchman nor Yankee has yet got hold of. I trust, by the by, that neither you, sir, nor your servant are anything in that way. Very good; I ask your pardon, I'm sure. There is a stone target.'

This afforded quite a geological study, vast masses of different material, from granite to red sandstone, making up together a plane surface upon which very little impression seemed to have been produced; it appeared, indeed, so much more stubborn and capable of resistance than its iron brethren, that I scarcely liked to speak of it to the champion of attack. The red sandstone was quite scooped out by missiles, it is true, and exhibited the tops of several sunk within it, but the granite was hardly chipped, and the fossiliferous rock had scarcely one of its numerous specimens disturbed. What a strange mutation was this that had brought Armstrong bullets into contact with fossils! the latest improvement in modern gunnery with these remains of primeval life! If the megalosaurus could revisit the glimpses of the moon—supposing that there *was* a moon in his time—he would be bowled over by the smallest weapon at Shoebury like a ninepin; he would be slain, I say, before he could open his monstrous jaw in expostulation, as surely as the domestic cat is (too often) cut off by the pea-rifle.

'If you want to see how a shell goes about his business'—observed the sergeant.

'We don't,' interrupted Thomas.

'We do,' said I, 'above all things.'

'Then here you have it,' continued our conductor triumphantly. 'This is the section of an Ironclad, and exactly represents one of her lower decks. See where the shell has rushed through her vaunted armour, and once within, has delivered its dreadful message.'

The gaping orifice by which it entered, the torn-up planks beneath, the gashed and splintered deck above, through which the cruel thing had burst, made up quite a hideous spectacle. How terrible, then, must such a scene appear when peopled with dead and dying men, and flushed with blood, ere all the floating slaughter-house sinks down into the hissing deep!

'It must be rather dangerous,' said I, 'to watch experiments such as these. I trust precautions are taken to preserve to us our Lords of the Admiralty, and those military nobles who are so good as to look after our Thunder-store.'

'Ah, they takes care of their selves, you may depend,' returned the sergeant with emphasis. 'They've a splinter-proof shed, where you might put your babbies

to sleep without the least chance of a diminution in your family. Here it is, see, all snug and strong, with little eyelet-holes from which they can see all that's going on; and they have luncheon brought to them, bless you—have "the Iron Committee," as they are called—and a very comfortable method of carrying on a campaign it is.'

'And now,' said I, 'let us see the guns that commit all this mischief.'

'If you please, sir,' exclaimed Thomas earnestly, 'I had rather stay in this here shed.'

'A remarkably interesting spot,' observed the sergeant grimly; 'but I am sorry to say it cannot be permitted. The guns, however, won't hurt you, my man, because, you will see, they have got their mouths shut.' He led the way to a battery, and took out the wooden stopper that occupies the muzzle of the delicate Armstrongs, when they are not breathing forth flame and iron. 'Look at the rifling now; ain't it beautiful? Ain't she fit for any drawing-room in the land?'

'Well,' said I, 'she is smooth, and polished, and clean enough; but the drawing-room must be of tolerable size to hold her.'

'Then what will you say, sir, to this one as we were practising with to-day? Our twenty-two tanner, our six hundred-pounder—our big baby!'

No mother could have exhibited a greater pride in her first-born, than did the sergeant as he stood with his bronzed hand placed caressingly upon this gigantic gun. Mighty at the muzzle, it grew huger and huger towards the breech, like a drawn-out telescope reversed; or rather like some prodigious rhinoceros, whose iron hide misfitted more than usual.

'You heard this here lady speak as you came along, sir, I reckon. She have a beautiful soft voice.'

'An excellent thing in woman,' said I laughing.

'You may say that, sir,' remarked the sergeant, looking cautiously round him. 'I'm a married man myself, and I protest I'd rather hear number one battery firing all at once, than my little woman's tongue a-going when she's—' Oh, it's tea-time. I see her a-waving of her apron.'

The sergeant made a military salute; I dropped something into his hand, and he made another. Then Thomas and myself pursued our way; past a well-built jetty, and some machines for hoisting out of shipboard such little articles as Armstrong guns; past an artificial pond, where men were playing at constructing temporary bridges, over which guns could cross; past magazines of powder, and shot, and shell, the food of guns; past a considerable town, but newly erected, and inhabited solely by men whose mission it is to serve guns. The last thing we saw, as we looked back over the level strand, and when the noiseless shades of evening were falling upon England's Thunder-store, was that Leviathan gun as steadfast as the Sphinx, and like her, possessed of a riddle, the secret of which, I trust, may long remain with herself.

INSURED AT COPENHAGEN.

'THIS is the house, young gentleman. See, the name is on the doorpost there, but you can hardly read it, it is so old. *Strömvetter!* we folks who were born in Copenhagen know well enough where Willis and Boomen live.' So saying, the hackney-coachman who had brought me from the quay where the steamers touched, proceeded to open the door of the clumsy leathern ark in which I was ensconced as sole passenger. The man's English was intelligible enough, English being almost as commonly understood in Denmark as it is in Holland; and I at once alighted, and looked with some curiosity at the mansion which was likely to be my residence for the next six or seven

years. It was a large and lofty house, built of brick, that had been covered with plaster coloured of various gaudy hues, after the old Danish fashion, but which had been turned to a dull maroon tint by stress of weather. The gables and heavy porch, the mullioned windows, and tarnished weathercocks on the turrets, spoke of a considerable antiquity, and there were ranges of warehouses abutting on the main building. But for these warehouses, erected probably in the ancient days when a merchant was never happy unless his goods were in close proximity to his dwelling, the house would have been isolated. On either hand stretched a tract of rubbish-strewn ground, and half-effaced foundations of demolished abodes.

'Ja, ja!' said the garrulous coachman, as he slowly heaved down my slender luggage from the footboard—a good old firm that of Willis and Boomen, known and respected from New York to St Petersburg, ay, and Archangel to boot!

By this time the bell had been rung, and the porter had answered the summons. New to Denmark as I was, and, indeed, unused to any ways but those of London, I could not help giving a start of surprise at the sight of this important functionary, who had, I was afterwards told, been for thirty years in his present post. Jarl was a dwarf, but not one of those dwarfs whose puny stature inspires a contemptuous pity among ordinary mortals; on the contrary, he was a broad-built, muscular personage, with long arms, immense hands, an enormous head, covered with grizzled hair, on which was perched a red Slavonian cap, and a face such as Rembrandt would have selected from a thousand—an ugly, shrewd face, with malice in every line of it, and with lips that wrinkled curiously in a peculiar smile, shewing the strong, yellow teeth like those of a fierce dog.

'So,' said Jarl gruffly, 'you are the young master from England? Welcome to Denmark! You may think it a queer place, perhaps, but you'll get used to it before you leave it.' And the porter grinned ominously as he shouldered my trunk, and looked on while I paid the coachman. Jarl was not far wrong. I *did* think what little I had seen of Denmark queer. The formal rows of clipped poplars, the rows of brick houses, daubed with white or dark-blue plaster for the most part, the absence of life from most of the streets through which I had passed, had a depressing effect upon my spirits; nor was the afternoon of a nature to bring out the brighter features of the landscape; it was a dull, chilly day, with a leaden sky that threatened snow, and with hardly breeze enough to stir the sails of the thousand wind-mills around. Winter was coming, but had not yet come, and all things had a gloomy air, as if of apprehension.

I remember that as I stepped under the low-browed archway of the old mansion, an involuntary shudder passed through me, and, for a moment, a feeling of almost instinctive repulsion to the house and its inmates welled up in my heart. Such a sentiment, in a lad of my years, scarcely sixteen, and leaving home and my native country for the first time, was by no means extraordinary, but I had cause, long afterwards, to remember the impression.

It was pleasanter when I had ascended the broad stair of dark old oak, and was ushered into the private apartments of my employer, Mr Willis, who received me with cordial kindness of manner. Our connection was briefly thus: My father was an old correspondent of the great Copenhagen firm of Willis and Boomen, one of the best known mercantile houses in the Baltic trade, and he had arranged that I should be

sent to Denmark for some years, more as a pupil than as a clerk. The object in this was a twofold one—to perfect my knowledge of the foreign tongues, without which extensive correspondence is hardly possible, and to insure my becoming well acquainted with the products and customs of the north. It had been esteemed a high favour when Mr Willis agreed to receive me under his own roof. The merchant himself, an Englishman, but so long resident abroad that he spoke his native language less readily than the tongues of Scandinavia and Germany, was anything but what I had expected. He was a tall thin man, with a slight stoop, and hair dashed with gray, and a handsome grave face. I have called his face handsome, and so it must have been in youth, but the forehead was now deeply lined, and the restless blue eyes had acquired a habit of looking down, and were seldom or never fixed on those of the person with whom their owner was conversing. He was excessively neat in his dress, and had large white hands, with filbert nails, which he was vain of, and which he had a trick of paring and filing with a little pearl-handled instrument.

It would be a great mistake, however, on my part if I were to convey the impression that Mr Willis was in any way ridiculous or grotesque. In spite of one or two trifling peculiarities, on which a boy probably seized with greater avidity than a man would have done, he was respected by all who knew him. As a business-man, his experience, tact, and keen insight into the probable course of traffic had won him no slight praise, while he had a considerable share of accomplishments. A botanist, a conchologist, a dabbler in rotifers and marine animals, he astonished me by the wonders he exhibited with his large microscope, far more than he interested me by the sight of his cabinets of rare minerals and curious coins. Professors of the university, and learned men of all kinds were frequent guests at his table, and the conversation was often by far too deep and ponderous for the bewildered brain of a boy like myself; and yet, oddly enough, I could not help harbouring the idea that my employer cared nothing for these matters of art and science, with however great gusto he might discuss them in company, but that his real wishes and thoughts were far away from what seemed most to engross him. He was often abstracted, moody, and low-spirited. One thing was plain enough, his excessive fondness for his daughter, his only child, and who, as he was a widower, was naturally considered as his heiress. A pretty, delicate girl of about seventeen, with brown hair, and a faint bloom of rose-tint in her cheeks, was Annie Willis. She had been very well educated, and only too much indulged, since her mother had died early, and her father had been disposed to make an idol of the little frail creature whose eyes reminded him of his lost wife. But Annie's was a good, sterling nature, that could not easily be spoiled, and she promised to develop into a charming woman.

It has always been a puzzle to myself that I did not fall in love with Annie Willis. Boys of the hobbledoy period of life are commonly disposed to bestow their hearts on fair ones considerably their seniors, and here were beauty, goodness, and propriety combined. But perhaps the good-natured, sisterly way in which my employer's daughter treated me, presuming immensely, as I thought, upon the strength of the eighteen months more of worldly experience that she possessed, conquered me, and I soon learned to look on her as a friend older and more accomplished than I was. I have said that she was kind to me; she was, in truth, kind to everybody. Her old governess, Fräulein Müller, one of those white-haired, pudding-faced women, with a stock of accomplishments and a fine appetite, which Germany turns out by wholesale, was a living proof of it. Her work of tuition had long been finished; the pupil surpassed the teacher, but Fräulein Müller, who was

one of a large family of daughters, belonging to a Saxon *Oberpastor*, sorely puzzled to find them in *braten* and cabbage, remained at Copenhagen, the guest of her former charge.

When I began my regular routine in the counting-house, I found the latter rather a lively scene than otherwise. There were clerks of all ages—several who were as young as myself—and of almost all countries, Dutch, French, American, and even one English boy, who all, however, lived in the town, and seemed at first a little disposed to dislike me, as a resident under their employer's roof. They took it into their heads that I should 'give myself airs,' and had occult suspicions that I might play the spy on their conversation and habits; but I gradually won their confidence. At first, I was subjected to a number of petty annoyances—my pens were split, my inkstand upset, my Ready Reckoner hidden behind the office-stove; and it was not until I had caught the most mischievous of the imps, Hermann the Swede, in flagrant delict of dogeering and smearing my neatly-ruled account-book, and defeated him in single combat, that I was really admitted as one of their confraternity. After a while, they were confidential enough.

'I say, Wood, how does old Willis live? Some say he's stingy, and others tell a different tale. You ought to know. How does he treat you?'

'Well enough,' I told them.

'So he ought!' was the general remark, coupled with asseverations that he was as rich as a Jew—richer than Guldenstrom at the Haven; richer than even old Coblekink, the ship-owner, money-lender, and pawnbroker, in Elbekoping Street. The firm of Willis and Boomen had been in business seventy years, but Boomen was a myth. The last Boomen had died fifteen years ago, and all the capital and profits now belonged to the English partner, the successor of three generations of merchants. The lads could not find figures round enough to express their notion of the sum-total of our chief's wealth.

One youth, a shy lad from Prussia, ventured to say that he had heard his father say Mr Willis had suffered severe losses at the outbreak of the Russian war, which was then raging; but the remark was greeted with scoffs and incredulity.

'Losses! Willis is too wide awake for that!' said a French stripling.

'And if he did lose a few thousand thalers, what matters that to a man of his means?' cried another.

'Look at his interest in the Greenland fisheries—thirty whalers and sealers, as I know only too well,' bawled a youngster from Amsterdam.

'Mines.'—'Scrip.'—'Bonds, Exchequer bills, mortgages, whole safeholds of them.'—'Gold and securities stowed away in the vaults under this old barrack of a house!'—'Ah, I only wish I were old Willis; I'd make the guilders spin, I can tell you!'

Such were a few of the exclamations that fell from my comrades; and the rash heretic who had spoken of our chief as a sufferer from losses, was fain to take refuge in the invoices and vouchers he was drawing up, silenced and ashamed of himself.

One favourite subject of discussion in the counting-house, at least on occasions when Mynheer Claas, the Dutch cashier, was out of earshot, was the future destiny of our employer's daughter. Annie was beautiful—that all the boys averred; and as the heiress of her father's untold riches, there was no match too brilliant to be predicted on her behalf. She would marry a duke—a prince, so they all said; and I, who alone was in the secret, thought it would be a sort of betrayal of confidence if I revealed the real truth, that she was going to marry Nils Hagaermann.

But for Miss Müller, I should never have been wiser than my office chums, for though young Hagaermann was a frequent visitor, I had never

observed any particular assiduities of courtship on his part; and, indeed, the young merchant was so dull in conversation, that his presence was apt to be forgotten by others who had livelier tongues and brains. He was a stout, pale, large-bodied young man, of very light complexion, excellent character, and ample means; indeed, his father and grandfather had been famous men in their time, giants of trade, and principal citizens of Copenhagen. His mother, Madame Hagaermann, had one of the best houses in the New Town, gave handsome parties, and was reputed to be excessively rich. She had no other child than heavy, white-eyelashed Nils, and was wrapped up in him. She was an old friend of the Willis family, and it was understood that she had made up the match, which, in a pecuniary point of view, left little to be desired.

But for Miss Müller, as I have said, I should have been as ignorant as the other clerks on the subject of Annie's betrothal. The German governess, however, was very romantic and soft-hearted, and a great gossip, and she soon imparted to me the whole state of the case. The match was more likely to injure her own interests than otherwise, and Nils was certainly not a person likely to win the good word of a lady who studied Spiedler's novels and Wieland's poetry. But Madame Hagaermann, a clever, managing woman, whose quick black eyes, dark face, and Parisian vivacity of speech and gesture (she was from Bordeaux) contrasted forcibly with her son's heavy inertness, had thought the *gouvernante's* good word worth the winning. A cheap present or two, a good many kind smiles and sugared words, and the constant practice of inviting Miss Müller along with her pupil, had produced their effect—the *Fraülein* was loud in her praise of Madame, and even contrived to discover in silent Nils an *air noble*, for which I looked in vain.

It sometimes struck me that Annie Willis was afraid of Madame Hagaermann, and that she cowered before the bright imperious eyes of that proud, hard woman. Not that the widow was other than most kind and caressing in her manner towards the 'dear sweet child,' the 'little English dove' she had known since her cradle-days, and was never weary of praising and petting before company, but there was something tyrannical in the absolute taking possession of her on Madame's part. Annie must sit by her good friend always, and if any young man came up to ask her hand in the dance, he had to run the gantlet of the rich Frenchwoman's fierce scornful eyes, which never had a friendly look for those who seemed to admire her protégée. It occurred to me that Mr Willis himself, a man of the world and of education, was afraid of Madame too. He was very deferential to her, seldom opposed any plan of her suggestion, and even tried hard to hold converse with Nils, which was not easy.

I thought that, at first, Madame Hagaermann disapproved considerably of my presence under the roof of my employer, for she was very brusque and haughty towards me in our early interviews; but when she saw with what patronising sisterliness of bearing Annie treated me, the lonely English boy, new to the country, and unused to be among strangers, the worthy lady's dislike disappeared; I was always included in the frequent invitations to Madame's Tuesday and Thursday receptions, and grew to be rather a favourite with the young heir and hope of the house. Nils was a curious specimen of a lover. I think he cared a little for Annie, in his own cold-blooded way, for he hovered a few yards off, and his round gray eyes were seldom off her face, but he rarely spoke to her, and never danced with her, except under actual compulsion from his managing parent. Yet Nils thought of Annie a good deal, I am sure, for he would now and then ask me some common-place question about England, its habits, language, or productions, and then chuckle over the

reply, like some ruminating animal enjoying its meal. I believe he liked me because I was English and Annie's countryman; but he was in no apparent hurry to be married, and the engagement dawdled on sluggishly.

Often have I asked myself since then what were the girl's own feelings concerning the proposed match, and the only conclusion I can come to is, that she only realised it as a dim possibility afar off. She was very young, gentle, and timid, much under the influence of her elders, and probably accustomed from early youth to hear her betrothal to the heir of the great merchant-firm of Hagaermann and Company spoken of as a settled thing. Nils was not capable of fascination, but then he never caused annoyance or repulsion by any overt act or word. Such marriages have been before this, and have turned out charmingly well, as match-makers delight to say. This, however, was to end differently.

The hard Danish winter, with its dark skies, deep snows, and ice-bound waters, passed by. It was the gayest, and at the same time the healthiest season at Copenhagen, and I found my life a reasonably pleasant one. In office-hours, or rather in working-hours, for much of my duties led me to the docks or the warehouses where the bulky goods were stored, I found my hands pretty full. Mr Willis had told one or two old clerks to see that the 'English boy' learned the business, and it was not their fault if I did not know a Memel log from a ton of Russian tallow, while I became quite a judge of eider-down, barilla, Pomeranian amber, and white Livonian brandy. My spare time was very much at my own disposal, and my Danish and Dutch friends had taught me to skate and to shoot wild-fowl as adroitly as could be expected from a tyro in his first season. One especial friend I had, a young officer in the Royal Guards, Baron Stahl by name, and whom I admired, as boys only can admire those who seem to them to possess those physical powers and brilliant gifts which the young value the most. Stahl was a fine dashing fellow, with a bold bronzed face, a ready wit, and the courage of a lion. He was very good-natured and attentive to me, taught me to ride, lent me books and guns, gave me tickets for the opera, and was never tired of hearing me describe the queer old-world house where I lived, and—Annie Willis.

That, no doubt, was the heart of the mystery. It was because I was pretty Annie's boy-friend, domiciled under the same roof, that the baron, older, cleverer, in all ways superior to myself, sought my company. But I never guessed the true cause. My youthful vanity was gratified by the captain's friendly preference, and I did not conjecture the real reason of it. Stahl, whom I had first met at Mr Willis's house, never was asked there again, and seldom saw the English merchant's daughter, since he visited among the noble families of the capital, while we usually mixed with the chief burghers, no less proud and exclusive in their own way.

I have since seen cause to imagine that Madame Hagaermann, ever intent upon her son's interests, and shrewd enough to notice Stahl's admiration for Annie, had exerted her powerful influence to keep aloof a rival who might have been formidable to poor Nils. But whether Annie was aware of the baron's sentiments, I cannot tell; to all appearance, she was fancy free.

Towards the end of the winter, an incident occurred which for the first time caused doubts in my mind respecting the stability of the long-honoured house of which I was a subordinate. I was returning from the marshes, wet and weary, and thoroughly out of spirits; the ducks had grown shy since the thaw, the treacherous ice had broken under my tread, and caused me a partial immersion in slime and water, and my game-bag was empty of all but one sorry snipe, after hours of trudging. As I passed the sharp angle

of a brick wall in the northern suburb, I heard a voice say in shrill quavering accents: 'Have nothing to do with it, Brother Isaac; it is a rotten reed, the house of Willis and Boomen.'

'The Gentile hound spoke me fair, and proffered good interest for the money,' said a deeper voice hard by, and though both men spoke in Danish, I had learned enough of the language to comprehend them, and by peeping round the corner could see the persons whom I had overheard: a big, black-whiskered man; and another, bent and withered, with a long gray beard. I recognised the latter as Reuben Munch, a Jewish dealer in curiosities, whom the boys of the town often jeered and hooted, but who was notorious for his wealth, and was reputed to lend money at huge interest.

'He said,' pursued the other, 'he only needed the sum to make up a bill on'—

'Pshaw! liars will lie,' fiercely broke in the elder Jew; 'the cur wants the cash for Madame Hagaermann. Are you a child, Isaac, not to know that he owed her husband ninety thousand florins, that he has signed papers which make him a puppet in her hands, and that she can make or mar him! If his daughter marry her booby son, he may get a quittance. As it is, she can squeeze him dry, like an orange. Where are your wits, Isaac, son of Chelid? Was it not told at the door of the synagogue, how, when the Russian war began'—

Here the speaker, in his excitement, broke into Hebrew, or more probably into the Chaldaic dialect, familiar to educated Jews, and I could not distinguish another word, as the dealer in curiosities and his relative or friend passed on, and left me thunderstruck.

Mr Willis—Willis of the great firm of Willis and Boomen—in want of cash—applying to Jewish usurers for a loan, and in vain—he whose name stood so high on the exchanges of Europe! And what was that imperfect scrap of conversation relating to Madame Hagaermann, and her supposed power over my employer? Could it really be so—that he was the debtor and bondsman of that imperious woman—that his best chance was founded on the sale of his daughter to one whom she could never love—Nils Hagaermann? The mystery was almost too much for my young intelligence, but I courageously determined to keep it to myself. It would have been a sort of treachery, I felt, to reveal it to the idle gossips of the counting-house. Even from Otto Stahl I kept the secret; nor would I reveal it now, but that there are none living who could be served by its suppression.

There was one inmate of the old house with whom I could never be on cordial terms, never get over the first impression of dislike and distrust, and this was Jarl. The dwarfish porter, sitting in his den, opening on the deep doorway, with his red cap crowning his impish features and broad body, used to put me in mind of those ugly and malicious gnomes who are said in northern legends to keep a jealous watch over buried treasures. No one liked Jarl, and I am sure that he returned the compliment to humanity. Stay—one there was, for whom this ill-favoured human bandog had a canine attachment and fidelity, and this was Mr Willis our chief. Jarl was the third descendant of a race of hereditary porters, and it was an article of faith with him to render true service to the head of the great firm whose bread he and his had eaten so long. My young companions loved to tease Jarl, calling him a troll and a drow, wafering up frightful caricatures of him in the porch, or trying their raw wits in a contest of repartee with his bitter tongue. I, however, wishing to be on friendly terms with all about me, tried to conciliate the dwarf, but failed signally; Jarl was prone to dislike those whom the 'master' seemed to favour, and I have even seen him scowl savagely when pretty Annie tripped past him.

It was about a week after my curious meeting with

the two Jews, and when the impression produced by their words was fading away, that the actuary of the great Dannekskiold Insurance Office, accompanied by a clerk, visited our premises. We—I cannot help using the collective term, which implied a sort of common interest in the firm—were already insured against fire, but that was in the smaller office of the Phoenix. Herr Rosenthal, the right-hand man of the monster company, was a well-known personage in Copenhagen, and his visit caused some excitement among us. It was whispered, on what authority I do not know, that the dwelling, as well as the valuable effects in warehouse, and especially those lately unloaded from the *Blue-eyed Jane* of Liverpool, were to be insured for an immense amount. Nor did Herr Rosenthal, as he walked about arm in arm with our principal, appear to throw any difficulties in the way; on the contrary, he seemed readily to accede to all which Mr Willis advanced, and the clerk's work was merely of a formal nature.

That very night, as I was undressing in my own room, at a later hour than common, since I had been to the theatre with Baron Stahl, I missed my bunch of keys, some of which unlocked my desk, trunks, and so forth, and which I had no doubt left in the counting-house; indeed, I could vaguely remember having quitted the office in a hurry, in consequence of some unexpected errand, and no doubt the key was yet in my desk, with the rest of the bunch dangling from it. This was annoying, for there was a particular trunk which I desired to open, and I was averse to waiting for the morning. Surely I could easily, with a little care, slip down stairs, and make my way from the dwelling-house to the deserted office, without disturbing any member of the family, all of whom, I calculated, were by this time probably asleep.

Opening my door very cautiously, and taking off my boots, I glided down the oak staircase with noiseless tread, and had got more than half-way to the counting-house, when I noticed, with surprise, that a side-door that led into the range of warehouses was ajar, and that a stream of yellow light flowed through the aperture, while voices were conversing within: they were those of Mr Willis and Jarl the porter; and low as they spoke, I caught the words in passing: 'That I should have fallen so low. Well, it is for dear Annie's sake! When do you say the smugglers can fetch away the goods from the *Blue-eyed Jane*?'

Jarl gave a gruff chuckle, and said something about the hour when the moon went down; but unwilling any longer to play the involuntary part of eaves-dropper, I turned back, sped swiftly up the broad stairs, and reached my room unseen.

This was on a Monday; and on the Wednesday following, Madame Hagermann gave a conversazione, which was expected to be unusually well attended. Mr Willis, however, who had seemed in unnaturally high spirits for the last day or two, never at rest, never silent, but always laughing, talking, and on the move, was unable to go; he had important business to transact, even at a late hour, and, besides, he had promised Count Thorn, the minister, to be one of the guests at his monthly reception, which fell, by ill-luck, on the same night as Madame's assembly. Therefore I—Henry Wood—must escort Miss Willis and Fräulein Müller to the mansion of the rich widow.

I was dressed in good time, and kicked my heels in the lonely apartments, wondering, in my boyish impatience, at the unconscionable time occupied by the ladies' toilettes, when Fräulein Müller came in at last, with a vexed air on her good-humoured, homely face. We must go alone, she said. Madame would be so disappointed, if none of us came; and Annie could not be one of the party. The poor child had a frightful headache, a headache which prevented her from even thinking of joining the gay crowd; and

Miss Müller had vainly exerted all her eloquence and cajolery for the last hour in a fruitless effort to persuade her to make an effort.

Was Annie's headache real? I have often wondered, or was it a mere pretext for avoiding the party, and the disagreeable presence of Nils Hagermann? who had of late become very pressing in his attentions, urged thereto by the imperious nods and constant hints of his mother, who desired the match to be hastened. At anyrate, Fräulein Müller, though sincerely sorry for her charge's indisposition, could not bear to lose the pleasures of the evening, the music, the cake and weak wine, the hazy philosophical small-talk, the recitations of poetry; and she went off to the party under my sole escort.

The rooms were crowded; a babel of tongues wagged at once, and I daresay that Miss Müller enjoyed herself; but I thought the hostess looked very black and glum at the news of Annie's headache, and Nils was a greater bore than usual, as he followed me to and fro, asking rapid questions about her health. Very late in the evening, as many of the guests were leaving, Mr Willis entered. He was very pale, and there were blotches of red, like spots of a hectic crimson, on his sallow cheeks. I looked anxiously at him, under the impression that he was ill, but he came up to me, and said with a sort of feverish gaiety: 'Well, my boy, how have you amused yourself? It was so hot in the minister's saloon, that I slipped off, and came here for half an hour. Has Annie been introduced to the poet—that German fellow whose queer verses she was wild about? Madame said he would be a lion to-night.'

'Miss Willis is not here, sir,' said I; but I was absolutely frightened at the ghastly change that came over her father's face as he gripped my arm with sudden fierceness.

The next question was rather gasped out than spoken: 'Where is Annie? Not at home? Not at home, surely—not beneath that roof?'

I did not know what to do, alarmed as I was for my employer's sanity, and observing that his violent gestures were already attracting the notice of those around us. But before I could answer, another and more dreadful voice took up the task of replying—the deep, sullen clang of the great bell of the Frue Kirk, or high church of Copenhagen, and which is never tolled save at conflagrations, or a death among the royal family of Denmark. For a few seconds, the ill-omened notes hushed every tongue, but then arose from without a wild cry of 'Fire!'

A clamour of excited voices, both within and without the mansion, arose at once, women screamed, men hurried to throw up windows or withdraw curtains, hoping to discover the extent of the mischief. Then there was a sound of hurrying feet, and an officer of the Royal Guard in uniform entered hastily, followed by two soldiers; it was Baron Stahl.

'Are the family of Mr Willis here?' he exclaimed in a loud voice, running his eye over the crowd of guests. 'I trust in Heaven they are, for it is his house that is burning, and there seems little hope of saving it. I happened to be on duty, and my men are aiding in the attempt to extinguish!'

A hoarse, agonised cry, like that of a hurt wild beast, interrupted Stahl's speech, and Mr Willis, bare-headed, and with the frantic gestures of a madman, rushed from the room, and forced his way through the thickening multitudes that encumbered the streets in the direction of his own abode. The German governess announced, sobbing and panic-stricken, that Annie was in the burning house, and on the instant the room was deserted by almost all the male guests, eager to render help, if human help were still possible. Stahl and I were the first to reach the spot.

The great old house was in a blaze, and the warehouses were on fire throughout their whole extent, emitting dense volumes of smoke and showers of

sparks and burning splinters. From all the lower windows the flame spouted like a fiery fountain; but the upper part, though wreathed in dark smoke, and licked by tongues of flame that crawled up the whole front of the mansion, was not yet ignited.

At a window in the uppermost story were dimly visible two human forms, whose fluttering and light-coloured garments proclaimed them to be females; but it was not until a sudden gust of wind cleared away the smoke that we could see that one of them was Annie.

Annie it was, and she stretched out her pretty girlish face, deathly white with terror, and waved her arms beseechingly. The other, a young Danish woman, one of the female servants, seemed stupefied with fear, and clung fast to the sash, motionless. The firemen were busy; their helmets glanced in the fierce light, and their engines flung water incessantly on the flames, but their toil was in vain.

Mr Willis, pale, haggard, with frantic gestures, was appealing to the crowd. Many of the bystanders knew him well, and in pity would have removed him from the spot, by force, if necessary, but he broke from them, crying aloud: 'Save my daughter! save her—only her, and you shall have all—all—even the gold of the Daneskiold. Ha! that was a brave plot. Well done, Jarl, trusty Jarl! the old place burns like touchwood. Why, let it burn. It builds up my fortune again, high as that black smoke and red flame, aha! Wretch! wretch! I have murdered my own child! Annie, dear Annie, it was for you I sold my soul to the fiend. Save her! O save her!'

While he raved thus, and every word added fresh evidence to his frenzied confession, a ladder had been brought by some of the soldiers, and Stahl sprang forward with an energy and passion such as I had never seen before, and called in a loud voice for 'volunteers!'

'Volunteers to go to that window with me! I go first. Who will risk his life to save those of women? I only want two; who speaks first?'

There was a short dreadful pause. The peril was so extreme that it blanched the cheeks and froze the blood of many a stout fellow who was no coward on ordinary occasions. Whoever climbed that ladder must pass the lower windows, from which the flame and heat gushed savagely as from the jaws of a furnace, and the risk of being overwhelmed by a sudden downfall of burning beams and calcined bricks was no slight one.

'I will go, captain,' said a soldier who had fought under Stahl and others in the German war.

'Another!' called out the baron. 'We must have one to hold the ladder fast, while the work is done. Quick, quick! No—not you, my poor boy' (for in the excitement of my feelings I had offered the aid of my comparatively feeble arm to save poor Annie); 'I want a man, if there is one here.'

One of the firemen here came forward, saying that he had daughters of his own, and would lend a hand for their sake to save women in such awful peril; and in a moment more the ladder was lifted in the grasp of the three adventurers.

'Look to that unhappy man,' cried Stahl, pointing to Mr Willis, whose outcries had now been succeeded by inarticulate moans of pain. 'Stand clear, all!'

With a rush they broke into the ring of fire and smoke and ruddy sparks, and, undismayed by the glowing heat and angry flame, planted the ladder. They went up—up through the blinding smoke—up through the scorching heat, through the midst of fiery tongues that fastened on the ladder as they went—Stahl foremost, cheering on the others. The ladder was on fire, the walls were riving and cracking into ghastly fissures, and once, as the black smoke volleyed out from door and window in dense masses, there was a cry that all had perished, and I turned away in despair. When I looked again, a cheer broke from

the people, and another, and another; and they came down, blackened, burned, bruised, but bearing in their arms the helpless forms of those whom they had ventured their lives to save. Stahl was the last to descend, with Annie, who had fainted, supported in his strong grasp; and as he sprang from the ladder and pushed his way through the crowd of shouting men and sobbing women, a hideous crash resounded, and the roof of the old house fell into the fiery gulf below with a noise like that of thunder. The rescue was but just in time.

The rest is soon told. Mr Willis was conducted to a neighbour's house, and tended with compassionate care; but his reason was gone. Jarl, the porter, was arrested on strong suspicion of having, in complicity with his unhappy master, fired the dwelling and warehouses, with intent to defraud the Daneskiold Insurance Office. This charge was corroborated by the discovery that the cargo of the *Blue-eyed Jane*, which had been insured for a great amount, had been secretly sold to certain smugglers, on condition that the goods should be removed by night. It was also rumoured that Mr Willis had been nearly ruined by certain Russian speculations, and that it was in his eagerness to raise a sum wherewith to pay his debt to Madame Hagaermann, and to complete the dowry of his daughter, that he formed the sinister design which had nearly proved fatal to his own child. But nothing certain could ever be learned from Jarl, who maintained a dogged silence, and on the eve of his trial was found dead, hanging from the barred window of his cell.

Almost all of Mr Willis's property had to be divided among his creditors, Madame Hagaermann coming in for the chief share. That astute lady at once forbade her son to think further of a bankrupt's daughter, and Nils, though he cared for Annie as much as was consistent with his nature, had never learned to disobey his formidable parent.

Annie is married, however, and to her preserver, Baron Stahl, who could not be deterred either by the poverty or disgrace which had fallen on the once respected name of the English merchant, from offering to the girl he had so long secretly loved the shelter of his name. They live on Stahl's small estate in South Jutland, as happy and attached a couple as any in Denmark; and their children are very tender and familiar with a bent, white-haired old man, who is always timidly desirous to please, and whom his little patrons call 'poor grandpapa.'

THE FAUNA OF AUSTRALIA.

AUSTRALIA has been termed, and not altogether without reason, the land of paradoxes, by a certain class of writers, who invariably commence their narratives by declaring that in that country the flowers have no perfume, and the birds no song; that the trees give no shade, and the cherries grow with their stones outside; that the swans are black, and the crows white; that the ducks are clothed with hair, and the porcupines have beaks like a quill; that the southerly winds are cold, and those from the north intensely hot; that Christmas occurs in midsummer, and July in the depth of winter; and last, but certainly not least, that the moon is turned upside down—a series of statements, some of which are true, some accountable for on perfectly natural grounds, and others utterly without foundation, save in the fertile imaginations of the authors.

For instance, while many of the more brilliantly coloured native flowers are scentless, some of the eucalypti, and all the mimoseæ, are extremely fragrant; the perfume of the former, especially, being so potent as to become almost overpowering where many of these trees are grouped together in full bloom.

Again, not a few of the Australian birds are certainly mute, but, on the other hand, there are a

good many sweet warblers amongst the *aves* of our antipodes; of these, I may mention the blue or painted wren, which formerly abounded in the neighbourhood of Melbourne, building in the dense tea-tree scrub that extended between that city and its port of Williamstown.

The zebra parrakeet, more generally known by the native name of budgerygar, and distinguished by its brilliant green breast, and back delicately banded with black and yellow, is a pretty universally diffused inhabitant of the Australian bush, and differs from all the parrot family in its faculty of song. It warbles a low, continuous, and by no means unlively melody, not unlike that of our English whitethroat.

The blue or ground thrush, and the collared shrike, or Australian magpie, are no despicable songsters; the latter, especially, possessing, when in a state of captivity, a marvellous faculty of imitating any tune that may be whistled to it a few times, which renders it a universal favourite throughout the colonies.

Without being exactly songsters, there are many of the birds of Australia which possess the most extraordinary notes. The *Dacelo gigantea*, for instance, a species of kingfisher, has a call which somewhat resembles a rude, powerful laugh, and rings through the lonely forests at regular intervals throughout the day—a peculiarity which has obtained for this bird the distinctive appellation of the 'settler's clock'; that, however, by which it is most generally known in the colonies is the 'laughing jackass,' from the fancied resemblance of its note to the baying of that melodious quadruped; though, in reality, it rather resembles the peculiar cry uttered by the common hen, when running away with a morsel in her beak which she is unable immediately to swallow, and fears her companions will take from her—though, of course, considerably louder.

The bell-bird is another not uncommon inhabitant of the bush, which has led many a waggoner a weary chase, from the great resemblance of its cry to the tinkling of the small bells on a horse's collar.

Another bird, a miniature magpie, which builds a solid mud-nest in the cleft of some dead tree, or upon a naked rock, has a loud and piercing note—'coo-hee'—the latter syllable indefinitely prolonged, which has been borrowed by the Australians, natives and aborigines, and is used by them as a substitute for, or an equivalent to our 'hollo!' and can, on a clear day, be heard at a very considerable distance.

The monk or vulture-bird, a species of shrike about the size of a fieldfare, very common in some parts of Victoria, has also a peculiar cry, which some have likened to the words: 'What o'clock?' but the shepherds, thirsty souls! to 'Glass o' grog,' which they declare to be the true interpretation of the bald-bird's note!

The native pheasant or lyre-bird, the *Mesura superba* of Gould, is a performer of considerable merit, imitating, in its wild state, every sound that resounds through the forest in which it resides, from the low, sweet warble of the painted wren, to the hoarse, grunting squeak of the opossum.

The mopoke, a species of owl well known in the colonies, has a note somewhat resembling that of the European cuckoo, which has given occasion to some of the writers before alluded to, to declare that in Australia the cuckoo is nocturnal.

The black lark is a pretty good songster, rising in the air whilst singing, like our own skylark, which, however, it much surpasses in size and beauty of plumage, though certainly inferior to it in song.

The bower-bird is a beautiful creature, conspicuous for the rich satin texture of the glossy black plumage of the male. The young at first are of a dull green colour, which after a while becomes mottled with black, and finally altogether changes to that hue. Its habits are extremely interesting and curious. Long before the construction of the nest, and quite

independently of it, these birds, with consummate skill, weave, with twigs firmly planted in a platform of various materials, an arbour-like gallery of uncertain length, in which they amuse themselves with the most active glee. The architecture of the bower is extremely tasteful, and the ornamentation of the platform on which it stands an object of constant solicitude to the birds. Scarcely a day passes without some fresh arrangement of the shells, feathers, bones, and other decorative materials, which they sometimes collect for this purpose from long distances in the bush.

The parrots form one of the most characteristic features in the fauna of Australia, and are exceedingly numerous, upwards of fifty species having been already determined, mostly belonging to generic groups which are altogether peculiar. Of these, the grass parrakeets are one of the prettiest; they, for the most part, inhabit the vast plains of the south, living almost entirely on the ground, and feeding on the seeds of grasses. At certain periods of the year, they migrate in immense flocks, their line of flight being apparently regulated by the scarcity or abundance of food afforded by the localities they visit. Their flight is very graceful; and as the tail is generally expanded in rising, the brilliant colours of the side-feathers make a striking and attractive display. The red-backed, shell or rosella, and crested parrakeets are also common and very beautiful; but Pennant's parrakeet, also called in the colonies the king-parrot or king-lowy, is the most magnificently plumaged of them all. The white cockatoo is a noble bird of snow-white plumage, with a bright amber-coloured crest, and is found in great abundance throughout the colonies, committing sad havoc among the ripening corn. It is so extremely wary, posting sentinels in the surrounding trees while plundering the farmer's crops, that it is difficult to snare or shoot it. Of this bird there are several varieties, of which I may mention the rose-crested, and the cockatoo-parrot, which has no crest at all, both much rarer than the white cockatoo.

The black macaw, or, as it has been erroneously termed, the black cockatoo, is a very curious, and rather scarce inhabitant of the Australian bush: it feeds exclusively upon the seeds of the eucalyptus, rarely if ever descending to the ground, and its nest has never been discovered by either aborigine or colonist. This bird has, not inaptly, been termed the colonial weather-glass, for when it has been observed to fly high up in the air, dry weather may be expected; but when, on the contrary, it just skims along the tops of the trees, in its evening flight towards its unknown roosting-place, uttering its peculiar wailing cry, it is equally certain that rain is not far off.

Australia is rich in pigeons, upwards of twenty beautiful species having been already discovered; of these, the bronze-wing and wonga-wonga are the most remarkable, the former being especially conspicuous for the metallic lustre of its plumage, and the latter for its large size, and the whiteness and delicacy of texture of its pectoral muscles, which are unapproached by any other species of this widely-spread and useful family.

The porphyrios are a beautiful genus, closely allied to our common water-hen, and pretty generally distributed throughout Australia, abounding on the ornamental waters in the Melbourne Botanic and Zoological Gardens.

The Australian crane very nearly resembles the great saras crane of India, from which, however, there is no doubt that it is distinct. This bird is remarkable for the bright red hood that covers the back part of its head, and the great aptitude it evinces for domestication. In fact, it has received the name of 'native companion' from the colonists, on account of the docility with which it accommodates itself to the society of man. According to Gould, this bird is only found in Northern Australia; but I have seen it frequently in different parts of Victoria.

Australia is well supplied with water-fowl: among these may be mentioned the pied goose, the *cereopsis*, that celebrated *rara avis in terra*, the black swan, the Australian shieldrake, the mountain duck, a large and beautiful species, the black duck, and an immense variety of teal.

In the natural history of the whole class *aves*, there is nothing more remarkable than the mode of reproduction of the *Megapodes*, to which the talegalla, or, as the Australians call it, the brush-turkey, belongs. Instead of hatching their eggs by the ordinary method of incubation in a nest, these birds construct a mound of leaves, grass, moss, or other materials capable of generating and retaining heat, in which the eggs are carefully buried, and watched by the parents until the young are matured, and issue forth from this novel hatching-machine stout, strong, and so fully feathered, as to be capable of flight on the second or third day of their existence! The male birds construct the hatching-mound, which is generally situated on the slope of a hill, by throwing the leaves and grass into a heap, by means of their powerful feet. When it has reached a height of about four feet, all the birds work together to reduce it to a flat surface, and then begin to excavate a depression in the centre: in this the eggs are deposited, according as they are laid, and covered up to a depth of about fifteen inches by the males, who also watch the temperature of the heap very carefully, almost uncovering the eggs during very hot weather, and always maintaining a circular opening in the centre of the mound, probably to insure its thorough ventilation. On the young bird chipping out of the shell, it remains in the heap for about twelve hours, without making any effort to escape from it, being at that time almost as deeply covered up by the male as the remaining eggs. On the second day, it comes forth, with its wing-feathers well developed, but enclosed in a sheath that soon bursts; and, early in the afternoon, returns to the mound again, where the assiduous father covers it up, but at a lesser depth than the circle of eggs from which it emerged in the morning. On the third day of its existence, the nursing is capable of strong flight. These birds thrive remarkably well, and when supplied with a sufficiency of vegetable material, breed readily in confinement, and, I may add, are excellent eating. I have seen nest-mounds of the brush-turkey, in the vicinity of the Mallee Scrub, near Inglewood, that contained two or three large cart-loads of vegetable matter.

The emu (an aboriginal term signifying bright-eyed) is the representative of the ostrich in Australia, to which country it is exclusively confined, although allied species, which have been sometimes confounded with it, exist in the adjacent islands. This large wingless bird was formerly very numerous all over the Australian continent, but has now almost disappeared from the settled districts. It is readily tamed, whether taken young or in the adult state, and is very mild and gentle in its disposition, subsisting entirely upon grass and leaves. It lays a rather large dark-green egg, deeply pitted with small circular depressions about the thicker end, and is reckoned a great dainty by the aborigines. The oil obtained from this bird is held in great repute throughout the colonies as an infallible specific for rheumatism, and is of such a penetrating nature that it can only be kept in a glass or glazed earthenware vessel, since it works its way through iron or any other metal.

The fly-catchers or tree-swallows form another very beautiful group, the blue, black, and golden varieties being the most conspicuous. These birds are summer visitants in Victoria, and their winter habitat is a subject of considerable dispute. They all lay two eggs at each sitting, and breed twice during the summer. They are very readily tamed.

The finches, of which there are a great many varieties, many of them of considerable brilliancy,

form another very attractive family of Australian birds; the most common are the diamond-sparrow and fire-tail finches, which breed abundantly in the vicinity of Melbourne, building large dome-shaped nests of grass, lined with hair and feathers, and laying from six to eight or ten eggs at a sitting.

The Australian robins, of which there are several varieties, are tolerably abundant, and, like their European prototype, are seldom seen in the vicinity of human habitations, except in winter, inhabiting, at other seasons, the deepest recesses of their native woods. They are perfectly mute, but several of them most brilliantly plumaged.

Hawks and eagles are numerous in the colonies; one of the latter, called the eagle-hawk, attaining to a very large size. The most remarkable of the hawks is a white variety, with yellow legs and beak. Quails are plentiful in the cultivated districts; and snipe and woodcock, almost identical with those of our own country, are by no means rare on the swampy volcanic table-lands, popularly designated 'Bay of Biscay,' and like their European brethren, are birds of passage, disappearing, no one seems to know whither, in the summer.

It is a remarkable fact, that all the indigenous mammals of Australia, with a few exceptions to be noticed hereafter, are marsupial—that is to say, the young are born in a rudimentary state, and transferred to a pouch situated on the lower part of the abdomen of the female, and supported by two peculiar bones, termed 'splanchnic,' where they remain until they have attained their full development. With the exception of a few found in America, these curious creatures are confined to Australia and the adjacent islands; the best known of the group being the kangaroo, of which there are many varieties, varying in size from that of a small donkey to that of a domestic cat. The general appearance of these creatures is so well known that it would be superfluous to enter into any minute description of them.

The island of Tasmania, formerly called Van Diemen's Land, possesses some curious animals, which are not found on the Australian continent; of these, the thylacine, the largest carnivorous marsupial now known to exist, is one. This creature is about the size of a pointer-dog; it is nocturnal in its habits, like all the marsupialia, and is extremely voracious and ferocious, giving great trouble to the shepherds by constant attacks upon their flocks; it is consequently the subject of an incessant war, which, sooner or later, must lead to its extermination. As, however, it is possessed of immense activity, bounding without difficulty to a considerable height, and as it inhabits the most inaccessible haunts, it may yet continue to defy its enemies for many a long day. Its popular name in Tasmania is the 'opossum wolf.'

The dasyure, or native 'devil,' is another remarkable inhabitant of Van Diemen's Land, which is not found on the adjacent continent. This creature, which is about the size of a bull-terrier, somewhat resembles a pig, or rather a wild-boar in shape, and, like that animal, is covered with bristles, and armed with formidable tusks. It is carnivorous and nocturnal, and very destructive to the settlers' flocks, but is annually getting scarcer and scarcer; so that, in all probability, before many years have elapsed, it will take its place, along with the dodo and dinornis, among the animals extinct within the historic period of our globe.

The opossums are a well-known group of herbivorous marsupials, of which there are several varieties: the gray, the black, the brown, and the ring-tailed. The last is the commonest in the vicinity of Melbourne. The black is peculiar to Tasmania, although it has been asserted that it has been occasionally found in the Western Port district in Victoria—however, its occurrence there has never been satisfactorily proved. The gray or brush-tailed opossum is very abundant

'up the country,' and formed the staple food of the aborigines before the arrival of white men in Australia. The brown is probably a variety, or possibly the young of the former, as it is often found in the same nest with it. Albinos have been met with, and are referred to this species, but are rare.

The phalangers, or flying-squirrels, form another group of marsupials, extremely abundant, and are divisible into several species; like the opossums, they are arboreal and nocturnal, but, unlike them, are insectivorous. The largest is the vulpine phalanger, which rather exceeds the size of the gray opossum, is of a dark-brown colour, with the tips of its ears and tail white, and abounds in the 'stringy-bark' and 'mess-mate' forests in the vicinity of Ballarat. It has a loud and piercing cry, which is heard at a great distance through the stillness of the night. Another variety is about the size of a rat, and is clothed with a delicately soft fur of a beautiful silvery gray hue; another is hardly larger than a common mouse, and is the least of all the marsupials.

The 'native cats' form another group of carnivorous marsupials, which are pretty generally distributed throughout the colonies; they are about the size of a ferret, which they resemble in shape, and are either gray or black, dotted with white spots. These animals are very pretty to look at, but horribly destructive, committing sad havoc among poultry of every description, and even attacking lambs.

Next to the kangaroo, the wombat is the largest of the marsupials. Of this animal, there are two varieties, distinguished from each other by marked characteristics—namely, the Tasmanian and the Australian. The wombat is nocturnal, herbivorous, and lives in burrows excavated generally near the root of a large tree; a full-grown specimen weighs from sixty to seventy pounds, and is about three feet in length; the legs and tail are short, and the head is thick and clumsy.

The koala, or 'native bear,' is another curious marsupial inhabiting the country between Queensland and Victoria. It is not quite so large as the wombat, but is altogether a more striking-looking animal. It is strictly arboreal in its habits, of a delicate silvery gray colour, with long silky pendent ears, and, unlike the other arboreal marsupials, does not retire to a hollow limb or trunk during the day, but ensconces itself in the highest fork of a lofty eucalyptus, where, embracing the branches on either side with its fore-paws, and covering its eyes with its ears, it sleeps quietly till night summons it forth, to browse upon the tender leaves of the tree that has afforded it a shelter during the day. The young koalas are carried on the shoulders of their parents until they have attained the size of a cat, when they are turned off to shift for themselves. This animal is perhaps the least readily tamed of all the Australian fauna, seldom surviving the loss of its liberty more than a few months. It is gradually disappearing from the settled districts.

The *Echidna*, or porcupine, and the *Ornithorhynchus paradoxus*, or duck-billed platypus—which last has given occasion to some of the older writers on Australia to declare, that in that country the ducks were covered with hair instead of feathers—are perhaps the most remarkable specimens of animated nature to be met with in any part of the world. The former burrows in the hardest ground with wonderful rapidity, and the latter is an inhabitant of the rivers and creeks, but both are getting more scarce from year to year. Very little is known, even by the aborigines, of the true history or habits of these creatures: it has been asserted that the platypus lays eggs, but this is very doubtful. It seems to be generally allowed, however, that these animals are not marsupial, neither is the echidna, which, along with the former, constitutes the order of *Monotremes*, in which the intestine terminates, as in birds, in a cloaca, and the dental system

is merely rudimentary, whilst the organs of reproduction present many anomalies. How the young echidna manages to extract the milk from the maternal mamma with its long horny beak, I have never heard; but Dr Bennet, an acute observer, says the old platypus milks herself with her duck-bill snout, and the young ones gobble up the viscous fluid that exudes from her teats, as it floats on the surface of the river or pond they inhabit.

With the exception of the above-mentioned animals, and a species of bat, common in the caves on the south-west coast, the dingo or native dog is the only non-marsupial animal indigenous to Australia; a fact which has led many intelligent naturalists to conclude that it was imported thither by the aborigines, who are supposed to have crossed over from the Malayan Peninsula—an idea which is further confirmed by its general resemblance to the wild dog of India. It is about the size of a Smithfield sheep-dog, of a yellowish-gray colour, with a long bushy tail, and upright ears. It never barks, but howls fearfully at night, and the animals bred between it and the common dog retain these peculiarities for several generations.

It has been asserted that exposure to excessive heat and long-continued want of water were the exciting causes of hydrophobia; but this can hardly be the case, when we consider that in Australia, where I have seen the thermometer rise to 119 degrees in the shade, and where water is proverbially scarce, both the dingo, and the descendants of the European dogs, which have increased and multiplied there in great profusion, are entirely exempt from this fearful scourge, not one case of hydrophobia having ever been observed at the antipodes.

A FAMILY FAILING.

I, JONATHAN CHESTER, of Fastprint Villa, Lancashire, and also of Westbourne Terrace, Bayewater, am a Manchester man, and a radical to the backbone. The blue blood of the British millowner has run in the veins of my family ever since mills were. At what precise period they began, I cannot say for certain; but if Tubal Cain built a mill, he was my ancestor.

Notwithstanding my politics, the statesman who has my sincerest sympathy is Lord Derby. His notions of government, I am perfectly ready to admit, are ludicrous enough; his eloquence, to use a technical expression peculiar to my own calling, will never 'wash;' but yet there is that about him which Lord Palmerston can only boast of in a very inferior degree, and Richard Cobden will not possess as long as he lives, which endears the head of the House of Stanley to my soul. I feel for him; I pity him; there is not a pulse of mine that does not beat responsive to his, from head to foot, and most particularly in the foot, for the common link that connects us is this—we both have the gout, and have it uncommonly bad.

It is probable that the noble lord is not aware of my calamity, and it would be very impertinent of him to make public mention of it, if he were; but everybody knows how he suffers, and therefore there can be no indecacy in my alluding to the circumstance. 'The Earl of Derby was unable to visit Windsor Castle, in consequence of a fit of the gout;' 'The noble earl still remains at Knowsley Park, in consequence of the obstinacy of his late attack;' &c. These are the records which have won for that statesman Jonathan Chester's respectful, nay, affectionate regard. Even when his lordship was in office (a thing not to be thought of with patience, in a political sense), I could not read that 'the Premier was unable to attend the cabinet council this afternoon by reason of his distressing malady,' without a twinge of pity. And let me tell you, my friends, who do not suffer from the respectable disease in question, that a twinge

is something more than a pang. Yes, Gout knocks at the door of the charmingly situated villa residence of the millowner, and at that of the mansion of the lord of acres, with an equal hand; he knows no distinction between titled and untitled; he only demands that his victims shall be in competent circumstances, and tolerably well descended; for although I am told there is such a thing as 'poor gout,' it can be no more like the real thing, than home-made Curaçoa is to the luscious — 'Oh, my goodness! that the very mention of an insidious drink like that should have exacerbated the demon! Reader, it is in vain any longer to conceal the fact that I write this, in pencil, as I lie upon the sofa, TORTURED, RACKED, with a hand that is not altogether free from flying spasms, and a foot dipped in soda and water, and swathed in triple folds of cotton-wool.—I say there can be no such thing as poor gout. The Poor have no sorrows, to speak of, compared with — Thomas, John, you rascals! Susan! Elizabeth! Jemima Anne! Why is your master left to perish without assistance? Have you no human feelings? Can you not hear the bell?—Don't contradict me, sir! You must have heard it before the wire broke, and I don't care if I've broken fifty wires. . . . Thank you; those wet rags have relieved me; you may go now, and leave me the dinner-bell, where I can lay my hand upon it on the instant. . . . I am certainly better. . . . But what an idiot you were, John, to contradict a man with gout! What a blindworm! What an irrational ape! Go, go—go, I say.'

'Poor gout,' as I was observing, is a contradiction in terms; also the genuine disease demands a victim with ancestors. Nobody ever heard of a man without a grandfather having the gout. The possession of a father is not sufficient; for it is said that the Thing skips a generation, and comes indirectly in upon one, like the knight's move in chess, from one's mother's uncle. Can you conceive anything more maliciously fantastic, more ghostly capricious than this! Talk of the Banshee that sticks to your Irish families, who live upon potatoes and whisky, and have never been within two diseases of our complaint in their existence. Why, the Banshee is quite an agreeable visitor compared with the gout. He does not perch upon their great toes, I suppose, and fix therein talons of red-hot steel; he does not wake them in the dead of night by thrusting a skewer through their heels; he does not attempt to perform the operation of cupping upon their most delicate joints, which resent his efforts by swelling enormously and turning pink. Then take my word for it, that, compared to some things that haunt a family, the Banshee is a pleasant bird.

What mysterious terrors must have overwhelmed that man who was the first to have Gout! He probably imagined himself to be bewitched; possessed by some tormenting demon, like Ariel in *The Tempest*:

Now on the beak,
He flamed amazement; sometime he'd divide,
And burn in many places.

That's just what Gout does; he plays a horrid sort of Puss-in-the-corner all over one; now here, now there; sometimes coy, and sometimes decided, yet he never fails to tease. Never fails to tease, and rarely to torture: he has numberless instruments to work his fiendish will: besides his pincers (heated like curling-irons), his slowly perforating gimlets, and his whip-cord tightly wound beneath the affected part, he has his favourite Vice, in preference to which give me the most straitlaced Virtue. It has been truly observed of this engine that it compresses the limb selected until the agony becomes well-nigh unendurable, and then gives it one turn more. Cain, who had no grandfather, could not have experienced the punishment which comparatively innocent persons, like

Lord Derby and myself, endure many times *per annum*. It may be urged that since *somebody* must have had it to begin with, it is probable enough that it was invented expressly for the first manslayer; but we are told that Cain was a wanderer, and compelled to roam, which is quite incompatible with the disease in question. There is nothing which could induce a man with gout in his foot to put it to the ground; under such circumstances, hot ploughshares would be pleasanter walking than the cool green earth; Love may beckon, Gold may lure, and even little Bailey's desire, 'I wish I was behind you with a bradawl,' may be granted to the most malicious enemy of the afflicted person, without producing locomotion: he is deaf to ambition, to glory, and even to duty itself, if it includes pedestrianism in its programme. The ringing call of Marmion fails to stir him:

'Charge, Chester, charge! on, Stanley, on!—'

for how can we 'charge,' or how can we 'on,' when we have our foot at an angle of forty-five degrees, to decrease which elevation is anguish.

Speaking of poetry, I have just been reading one of those sentimental novels so common now a days, which seem originally to have been written in blank verse, and then recast, and I came upon this passage, referring to some unhappy social union: 'The shadow of his great woe overshadowed her.' Now, as it stands, that is mere vague verbiage, but the word 'woe' happened to be misprinted 'toe,' and the statement, by mistake, became a most sensible one! The shadow of my great toe overshadows my unfortunate wife; I do not refer, of course, to its physical size, although, indeed, *that* casts shadow enough—but to the unhappiness it occasions her. She knows when an attack is threatening me, even before I know it myself; my naturally angelic temper becomes ruffled; my language, generally so conciliating, is at this period rather hasty and unnecessarily forcible. She does not murmur; above all things, she does not contradict; she is another Griselda, in fact, in all respects, except that she places a couple of pills upon my dressing-table, so that I cannot fail to see them upon retiring for the night. These are gout-pills. Then say I: 'My dear love, you are quite mistaken; I never felt better in my life. Besides, I have not been the least imprudent lately.—*Draught stout?*—Well, what can be better than stout, or more innocent? Why, it's recommended for delicate mothers!—*Champagne cup?*—Pooh, pooh! quite harmless.—*Sauces with everything?*—Oh, that's all nonsense; if I am to live upon bread and cheese, I had rather not live at all. What do you mean, madam? I don't understand you; you are not a doctor, and if you are, I do not ask your scientific opinion.—*Isn't one to speak a word?*—No, one isn't; not a single syllable; that is, unless you can find something pleasanter to talk about than— O! Jerryusalem! * O him, bam, bomb!† what is the matter with my great toe? . . . Do you know, my love, I think I must have sprained it. Don't you think so, too? Doesn't it look very like a sprain—there, just there—don't touch it, for goodness' sake!—in the second joint—*Pink?*—Yes, of course, it's pink. Sprains are always pink; yes, and aching, too; those are two of their principal features. I remember how I did it, now; I stopped the carriage in Piccadilly to-day, and jumped out rather hastily; then I walked to the club. Nobody can say, you see, that I don't take exercise.—*Drove home?*—Of course, I drove home. What is the use of keeping a carriage, Mrs Chester, if one never drives? Yes, it's a sprain.

* I learned this expression from an American gentleman, who assured me it was used by the inhabitants of Pennsylvania, as an excellent substitute for profane swearing.

† These innocent interjectional expressions will be found not less serviceable in superseding execrations.

Now, what's a cure for sprains?—*Rags dipped in soda and water?*—Very good; anything else?—*Pills?*—No, I won't—ah! ugh! oh!—yes, I will. And I think I will see the doctor in the morning; and you may write to Captain Springal, to say that it's doubtful whether I shall be able to dine with him at Greenwich the day after to-morrow; and you may send that haunch of venison, which you said was too high already for you, over the way to old Keane, "with my compliments, and I had kept it on purpose until it should be just fit for his table." And you may give your mother the cream that we had from Devonshire last night.'

For the approach of certain gout is like that of death, in this respect, that one makes one's will, as it were, with reference to all perishable property of a toothsome character, and disconnects one's self from all worldly engagements that have been undertaken in the prospect of health.

I pass over the dark period when the Demon has altogether the upper hand, and his subject Man is prostrate, to speak of the time of convalescence—my present state—when Irritability once more resumes her sway, as before his assault. This era is not without its consolations. Even one's club companions, who have perhaps the least human feeling of created men, and would receive the news of our death, any fine afternoon, with the same sort of interest as they would a third Edition of the *Times* newspaper—even they, I say, make way in front of the fire, as we hobble into the library, and perhaps go so far as to hand us one of those scarlet rests, which some kind fairy at enmity with the wicked Enchanter Gout, must surely have invented to cross him. All persons are civil to men with a list slipper and a stick, except the abominable street-boys, who ejaculate at our approach; 'How's your poor feet?' or, 'Now, then, Deerfoot!' Street-boys have no fear; but others are cautious of giving offence to people who have been living on acids for many days, no matter what peaceful experience they may have had of them before. Gout, like an insult to one's Beloved Object, 'turns the sluggard's blood to flame,' and renders the very mildest, as in my own case, as fierce and unrelenting as the hyena. We are therefore treated with respect, and at least the outward semblance of sympathy; remedies are suggested, and mitigations advocated, by well-meaning friends; and even one certain Cure—as though gout could ever be cured! This cure I should have passed over with the contempt it deserves, but that it corroborates what I have said against the possibility of the existence of 'poor gout.'

'Now you should keep a cob, my good friend, that's what you should do; that would be the saving of you. A quiet, but fast-trotting cob.'

This recommendation, which merely makes me angry, as an exhibition of ignorance and presumption, would in the case of a poor man be a positive insult; he might just as well be recommended a white elephant. It would indeed suggest a flaw in the eternal fitness of things, if a disease should exist among us the remedy for which the majority of those afflicted could never afford to procure; we of the list slippers have quite enough of speculation of that perilous sort to occupy us already. That the sins of our fathers should be visited upon their children down to many generations, we humbly acquiesce in; but that the peccadilloes of our mother's uncles should come down upon us, zigzag as it were, and bear such bitter fruit, seems hard indeed. Both my grandfathers were free from this biting scourge, and died, with comparative ease, of ordinary diseases; but my maternal grandfather had a brother of whom it was flatteringly remarked, that 'he could give you as good a bottle of port wine as any man in England.' If he had confined himself to *giving*, I should to this day honour his memory, but he unfortunately also took it himself. He was a genial old soul, I do believe,

but he drank a great deal more than was good for him,

And now his shame goes blushing down a line of mill-owners.

There is a charitable report that he himself inherited this family failing; and that, finding he had gout within him, he imagined he was only doing his duty in bringing it out. Wretched man, the cause of woe to creatures yet unborn, it is possible that he may thus have deceived himself! We are all prone to self-delusion when it gratifies our—What will I have for luncheon, John? Well, I cannot think that green pea-soup will hurt me, and nothing is more wholesome than a red mullet. A little dash of sherry, too, in Seltzer-water, in case there should be anything of a suppressed character in this insidious disease of mine—Where was I? I was moralising about something. Men in my situation often do so, nor is it to be wondered at. Here to-day, and gone to-morrow; now in our great toe, and now in our stomach! Our end is certain, and on each of our chalk-stones—I mean on our gravestones—may be written, by way of elegy,

He lived not wisely, but too well.

THE CASTLE MOAT.

THREE be seas, and there be streams,
But commend me, for sweet dreams,
To the moat round Thurland's walls:
Thither come nor cares nor calls;
Nothing but the lullaby
Of the slow rook flapping by,
And the note, half-choked, half-clear,
Of day-dreaming Chanticleer.

Round and round, as if in sleep,
The dark moat-waters slowly creep;
Whence they come, or whither go,
That they know not; only know
Here 'tis meet to linger; here—
Better far than in river or mere,
Or sail-thronged pool by the town—
Where the smooth-shaven lawn dips down
With its wealth of flower and leaf,
And the heart of the feathered thief
Is gladdened, and sings to see
The clustered fruit on the tree
That clings to the terraced wall.
O'er the terrace, Thurland tall,
Swallow-haunted, ivy-clad,
Smiles as one who, having had
His days of trouble, henceforth spends
An honoured leisure among friends.
Wars enow that front hath seen,
Now but fenced in sheltering green,
Shock of cannon, whirl of shaft!—
Haply some ill-fated craft
Pushed with Cromwell's iron men
Across this moat—not back again;
Where now the rose-leaves only fall,
'Tis like they perished one and all!

There be ships and there be boats,
But beyond all else that floats,
Or has floated since the Ark,
Give me that flat-bottomed bark,
Without rudder, without sail
(But which fears nor rock nor gale),
Sleeping on that sleeping wave
Which doth the slopes of Thurland lave;
Not the ocean's self, I guess,
Owns a path more limitless;
Round, and round, and round I tend,
But Thurland's moat, it hath no end.

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